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British Court Completes Acquittal Of 7 Charged in Espionage Trial

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LONDON, Oct. 28 — The longest spy trial in British history ended today with the acquittal of the last of seven British servicemen charged with passing secrets to Soviet agents in Cyprus. A jury at Old Bailey acquitted all the defendants on all charges.

The defendant acquitted today, Senior Aircraftman Geoffrey Jones, 21 years old, was accused of organizing the purported spy ring. He had confessed to passing 200 top-secret documents and 800 documents classified as secret or confidential.

The trial has been held behind closed doors since the prosecution outlined its case June 10. The Government charged that the seven, five airmen and two soldiers, had done "incalculable harm" to Britain's interests by giving military secrets "by the bagful" to three foreign agents after reportedly being blackmailed for taking part in homosexual parties.

The Government contended that the men had gathered the secrets while working at a secret communications base at Ayios Nikolaos on Cyprus and at another station near Troodos Mountain.

Confessions Called 'Forced'

The defendants said their confessions to spying and to taking part in homosexual orgies were untrue and were forced out of them by their interrogators. They said they had been threatened with physical violence and abused verbally and interrogated until they made false confessions. Some, according to the judge who summed up the case, had even begun to believe the confessions themselves.

Neither the Ministry of Defense nor the Special Branch of Scotland Yard would comment on the assertions.

With the acquittal of the last defendant, estimates of the cost of the trial ranged from \$4.9 million to \$7 million. Critics of the Government called the trial an outrage, voiced concern over the methods used to elicit the confessions and demanded to know the justification for bringing the case to trial.

The defendants previously acquitted are: Senior Aircraftmen Christopher Payne, 26; Adam Lightowler, 22; Wayne Kriehn, 22; Gwynfor Owen, 22; Signelman Martin Tuffy, 23, and Lance Cpl. Anthony Glass, 32.

Charges Stem From Secrets Act

The men were charged under the Official Secrets Act, enacted in 1911, which prohibits the unauthorized disclosure of information.

At the opening of the trial, the prosecution acknowledged that its case was built mainly on the defendants' confessions. Michael Wright, the chief prosecutor, said the extent to which these admissions were "wholly true cannot be precisely measured." He also said their accounts of three so-called Russian agents were "shot through with prevarication, half-truth, and outright lies."

The trial judge, Sir. John Dexter Stocker, said Aircraftman Jones had been interviewed by Royal Air Force security officers for 55 hours and by the Special Branch of Scotland Yard for 21 hours and spent 17 hours over three days writing out a statement.

The defendant said the Air Force interrogators had told him he could be kept for "six days, six weeks, or six months" until he cooperated and that he became "frightened, confused," and ready to say anything.